



# Alabama Mosaic

Making Alabama's unique history electronically accessible.

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- Message from our new project coordinator, Dr. Beverley Rilett
- A conversation with Alabama Department of Archives and History's Justin Rudder on collaborating with AlabamaMosaic
- Staff highlight with graduate assistant, Stuart Simms

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## AlabamaMosaic—A Historical Overview 20 Years On...

Stuart Simms

AlabamaMosaic is an index of digital records from archival collections across the state of Alabama, supported by Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet), Network of Alabama Academic Libraries (NAAL), and Auburn University Libraries (AUL), AlabamaMosaic serves as a digital footprint for academic institutions and community partners seeking to make their archival collections freely accessible online.

After initial discussion of a statewide digitization project by a NAAL task force in 1999 and a following report to external funding sources, NAAL received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) in 2001 which lasted until 2004. The resource resulting from this grant, *The Cornerstone Project: Building the Foundation for Sharing Unique Treasures*, became a multi-pronged initiative for many in-state institutions to digitize their archival collections while also making them more accessible to wider audiences, especially those in K-12 education, with supplemental curricular resources. NAAL saw *The Cornerstone Project* as a primary-source supplement to the newly formed (and



Dr. Claudia McDade, Director of Center for Individualized Instruction, Instructs Students Using Computer Assisted Instruction Modules. Jacksonville State University Historical Photos Collection, 1992.

commercial-centric) Alabama Virtual Library.

Upon completion of the IMLS project, the statewide program was renamed AlabamaMosaic to highlight the widely scattered pieces of historical resources needed from institutions across the state to make a...

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## Welcome Message from the Project Coordinator, Dr. Beverley Rilett

Welcome to our first AlabamaMosaic newsletter, which aims to provide insights into the history and current operations of the project and to introduce key repositories and personnel.

I am pleased to have been asked to lead AlabamaMosaic last fall. In my role as Associate Research Professor and Digital Humanities Coordinator at

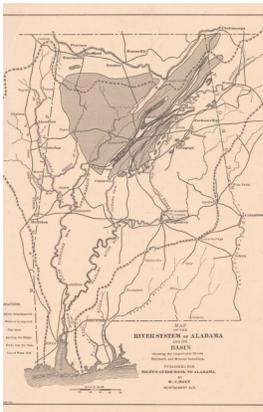
AUL, I wear several hats in addition to Coordinator of AlabamaMosaic, including directing [Alabama Authors of the 19th and 20th Centuries](#), [George Eliot Archive](#), [Review Online](#), and [Scholars](#). Thanks to the following for a smooth transition: Stuart Simms, Clint Bellanger, Carrie Hill, Meredith McDonough, and Sheila Snow.

In our first issue, we feature a historical overview of the project, along with an interview with Justin Rudder, Digital Asset Archivist at the Alabama Department of Archives and History. He discusses his role as a digital preservationist. We also introduce the stupendous Stuart Simms. In future editions, we will introduce other projects, partners, and personnel. Cheers!



Justin Rudder, ADAH Digital Asset Archivist

“...nothing prepares you to work in those fields quite like hands-on experience...”



Map of the River System of Alabama and its Basin. ADAH Alabama Maps and Blueprints Collection, 1888.

## Collaborating with AlabamaMosaic: A Conversation with ADAH’s Justin Rudder

Stuart Simms, Justin Rudder

**Tell us a little about yourself... What’s your role at ADAH?**

**Rudder:** “I work as a Digital Asset Archivist—scanning a variety of material ranging from photographic negatives to Supreme Court columns and prepping them for upload into our digital collections. I received my Bachelor’s degree in history from Faulkner University in Montgomery in 2009 and

my Master’s degree from Auburn University in 2014.”

**What got you into digitization? How has this changed over your time at ADAH (or in general)?**

**Rudder:** “My duties have always included a mixture of scanning in-house material and traveling around the state promoting AlabamaMosaic to smaller repositories that might

need assistance in creating a digitization program. Learning the workflows for digitization already in place at ADAH when I was hired—and determining how they could make my work more efficient—helped me in talking to colleagues around the state who were intimidated by the idea of developing their own digitization programs.”

**What would you say have been some of the largest hurdles you’ve had to overcome with digitization? How have you (or did you) get around these obstacles?**

**Rudder:** “My biggest challenge was learning how to take what I learned about digitization and share it with others. I’ve learned that while reading archival, library, and museum theories in the classroom is important, nothing prepares you to work in those fields quite like hands-on experience.

Hands-on experience teaches you to prepare for the unexpected when digitizing historical materials and broadens your skillset in completing projects.”



Explore ADAH Collections

**What have been some of your favorite collections ADAH? Are there any you’re excited to put out in the future?**

**Rudder:** “Besides digitization, I write on topics largely related to African American history and I am always fascinated by material related to underrepresented cultures. I love that a significant portion of our microfilmed newspapers are ac-

cessible through Newspapers.com—largely for the fact that newspapers once had the influence that social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have today. Whether positive or negative in their coverage, few secrets were hidden in newspapers. I’m also

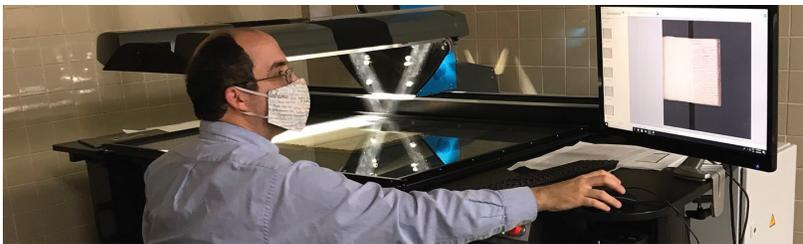
excited that we are improving access to collections regarding prison and mental health culture because insight from those areas of study is often overlooked.”

## When did you first hear about AlabamaMosaic? What were your first impressions? Did these change over time?

**Rudder:** “I may have heard AlabamaMosaic mentioned once or twice in my undergraduate education, but it was not until the end of graduate school that I became well acquainted with AlabamaMosaic and other digital scholarship platforms like the Encyclopedia of Ala-

bama and JSTOR. Being aware of these resources gives students and researchers a greater pool of information to draw from when writing term papers or professional monographs and articles. These platforms specifically make liberal arts students aware that there is

potential to make a career out of their degree when they realize the fields of education, historic preservation, and journalism are ever-growing fields.”



## How do you see AlabamaMosaic fitting into future digitization efforts within ADAH and the state at large? Do you see it as a beneficial endeavor for libraries across the state to engage with?

**Rudder:** “AlabamaMosaic has great potential in the future of digitization at ADAH and other repositories around the state. Not every institution has the same budget and staffing capa-

bilities, but we can all ensure our digitization workflows capture the most information possible from our physical collections and use metadata standards that help patrons

more easily search across collections from various institutions.”

## Historical Overview—Continued

more complete history of Alabama possible. To facilitate the growth of the project following financial downturn with 9/11, resources moved from AVL to Auburn University Libraries (AUL), which assumed responsibility for assets and the website.

Previous project coordinators have done much to expand the role and scope

of AlabamaMosaic. The first coordinator, Midge Coates, led the project from its inception through to her retirement in 2020. With technical support from Clint Belleranger and other staff in AUL IT, Midge grew the project and publicized AlabamaMosaic to statewide institutions and developed unique metadata harvesting tools and standards, including the VuFind open library search index.

Following Midge's retirement, Elizabeth Bates continued expanding inventory and harvesting practices from 2020-22. Carrie Hill, coordinator in 2022-23, implemented a new aesthetically overhauled, mobile-friendly website and hired AlabamaMosaic's first graduate assistant, Stuart Simms, to assist with the project. Bev Rilett, assuming pro-



“Court House.” ADAH Alabama Photographs and Pictures Collection, 1907.

“These platforms specifically make liberal arts students aware that there is a potential to make a career out of their degree...”



Robert Sills sewing a quilt at the 1990 Alabama Folklife Festival in Birmingham, Alabama. ADAH-hosted Alabama Folklife Collection, 1990.

ject leadership in October 2023, aims to improve public outreach through newsletters and webinars.

## AlabamaMosaic

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alabamamosaic.org

**Interested in participation in AlabamaMosaic (or looking to restart your relationship with us)?** Fill out our membership interest form [here!](#)



Join Us!

*We currently support content management systems with OAI-PMH plugins to make metadata harvesting possible including Bepress, ContentDM, DSpace Islandora, Omeka, and Quartex. If your institution is invested in a different system, contact us! We will work with you to develop a metadata harvesting tool compatible with your system.*



FAQs

**Interested in learning more about AlabamaMosaic, its mission, and functionality for your collections?**

Check out our FAQ page [here!](#)

### Staff Spotlight—Stuart Simms, Graduate Assistant

Stuart Simms is AlabamaMosaic's graduate assistant and a PhD candidate in Auburn University's Department of History.

His research in the history department centers around the US South, the development of military – industrial infrastructure in the region, and the effects of development on local communities and the environment. His work on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) John C. Stennis Space Center in Hancock County, Mississippi has been featured at multiple conferences sponsored by NASA as well as an edited anthology of work on the subject, *NASA and the American South* (University

Press of Florida, 2024).

Stuart's work with AlabamaMosaic includes day-to-day maintenance of the site's index, quarterly inventories of member institutions' digital collections, harvesting records from partner institutions for the AlabamaMosaic index, assisting the project coordinator with communications related to AlabamaMosaic, and collaborating with technical staff.

When he's not working for AlabamaMosaic or the history department, he can be found outside enjoying nature; enjoying coffee (and working on his dissertation) at one of Auburn's local coffee shops; catching a new movie; or binging trashy reality tv.



Stuart in front of the US Capitol Building.